

October 27, 1959

Richard Bryan,
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Dear Mr. Bryan:

Dr. Galarza has referred your letter of October 12 to me for a reply. You of course appreciate that the questions you raise are very thick-textured, and replies in the space available here must necessarily be suggestive rather than exhaustive. You appreciate, too, that several of your questions have to do with matters of opinion rather than matters of fact, and to put these matters into a perspective appropriate to a scholarly paper it would be well for you to seek the opinions of a number of persons both in the labor movement and out.

1. "Have you found that the supply of labor changes too rapidly during the harvest season to permit an effective organization program?"

Not necessarily. In San Joaquin County in the Spring, for example, several thousand workers move in for the cherry harvest. Most arrive in the first or second week of May and stay about five weeks. There is relatively little turnover. Much the same thing is true in the pear harvest in Lake County in August, the peach harvest in Sutter-Yuba Counties, and many other crop-activities which farm workers have woven into their round of life. But I must add the following to complete the answer to your question: there are times when something happens to break up the patterns which have been formed over the years, and on these occasions there may be a great deal of flux within a local farm labor market. Sometimes these ~~xxxxxxxx~~ untoward events are phenomena of nature, such as hot spells, cold spells, rain, etc. Sometimes they are man-made, but inadvertent. Sometimes they are man-made, and deliberate. For example, this year the peach growers of the upper San Joaquin Valley apparently drove away domestic peach pickers who had been coming into the area for many years for this particular harvest. This was done by a number of devices, some of which are mentioned in our research paper entitled "The Manufactured Labor Shortage and Crop Loss of 1959." Growers' motives are, of course, better known to themselves than to us, but primary among them seems clearly to have been embarrassment of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee. One of the more bemusing aspects of the episode is that despite their harrassment of the workers -- with the

result that many workers moved on up to Oregon and Washington -- peach growers of this area brought in the largest crop in history this year. To our minds, this raises some intriguing questions as to the bona fide labor needs of California agriculture, as distinguished from labor demands. But that is a story we cannot go into here.

2. "Are there any particular groups that have opposed farm worker organization, or are all the farmers opposed to organization?"

There are fascinating parallels between growers' associations and associations in other walks of life, such as the AMA and the ABA. The AMA would have us believe all physicians oppose the participation of government in the provision of medical services to society. We know this is not true. The ABA would have us believe all lawyers are reactionaries when it comes to civil rights and civil liberties. We know this is not true. Just so, the Farm Bureau and other growers' organizations would have us believe that all farmers will fight unionization to the death. Poppycock. The Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee is supplying several San Joaquin County growers with union crews at this very moment. We know for a fact that many other growers in this area are watching these pilot projects with great interest, and if they prove successful, will be happy to do business with the union. Growers, after all, stand to gain nearly as much from worker organization as the workers themselves. They are always squawking about the unreliability of the farm labor force. Organization, by definition, means stabilization and increased reliability. Sensible growers are perfectly well aware of this. I would not go so far as to say such growers are in a majority, but there are many of them, and I think the chances are fairly good that many who are keeping their own counsel at the moment will fall into line with a minimum of fuss and fanfare if it is made easy for them to do so. In other words, when a breakthrough comes, there may be a snowball effect.

On the other hand, there are grower organizations which exist solely for the purpose of union-busting, and it would be quite correct to say all their members will fight organization of farm workers. Associated Farmers, Inc., and Diversified Growers, Inc., are two such groups. We would be foolish to underestimate the ability of such organizations to whip independents into line through appeals to the nonsensical sorts of stereotypes which have proved effective in the past. At the same time, we would be guilty of a serious strategic error if we overestimated the strength of our die-hard opposition. For the moment, ~~we~~ at least, we will continue to assume that many if not most growers are creatures of reason, capable of grasping, for example, the fact that the value of the working farmer's own labor is limited to the prevailing price of hired farm labor.

A final point should be made in connection with grower organizations: some are actually pro-labor. The California Farm Research and Legislative Committee, for example, takes liberal stands on most farm issues. You might want to get in touch with the organization, which has its headquarters in Santa Clara. The National Farmers Union is even more liberal. It is a real force in the Central and Mountain States. At the present time, Farmers Union has no organization in California, but I understand this is going to be corrected in the near future.

3. "What would you say are the problems that are particular to the organization of farm workers that are not problems of the organization of industrial workers?"

I would put the question in a slightly different way: "Are there any problems peculiar to the industry of agriculture which make the organization of farm workers different from the organization of other workers?" My answer to this question would be "no." If you limit your comparison to steel workers, let us say, there are naturally profound differences ~~in~~ in spatial dispersion, etc. But the more appropriate comparison is with other types of workers who have been organized: lumber, fishing, canning and processing, longshoring, etc. Here the so-called "uniqueness" of agriculture disappears. Other industries are affected by the weather, others are highly seasonal, others deal with perishable products, etc. In other words, there is nothing inherent in agriculture which prevents the unionization of agricultural laborers.

The problems which exist have been created by man. Which means they can be removed by man. They include the following:

(a) Exclusion of farm labor from all significant social legislation. The most important exclusion is that contained in the Taft-Hartley Act. In every other industry, a representation election is conducted by the NLRB at any time the majority of the workers in a given establishment petition for it. If the NLRB had jurisdiction over agriculture, every corporation farm in California could be organized within six months.

(b) The Mexican "national, or bracero program, which in effect puts the United States government into the business of wreaking chaos in the farm labor market. Top administrators of this program have confessed to us, off the record, that they are well aware that the very existence of this program -- a single bracero imported annually -- would have a depressing effect on farm wages and working conditions, and the possibility of organizing domestic farm workers. But the law of the land requires the perpetuation of this sordid spectacle. Nearly half a million braceros are imported each year, with California the leading offender in terms of man-months of alien contract labor employed.

(c) Rotten farm wages and working conditions have inevitably tended to drive top-flight workers out of agriculture. Miraculously, there are still some left. But, speaking by and large, growers have forged for themselves a labor force with a number of characteristics which are unfortunate for the industry of agriculture itself, and unfortunate for the farm workers organizing drive. For example,

(1) In areas such as San Joaquin County, growers rely to a considerable extent upon the skid row element. In fact, if you come into this county looking ^{for a} farm job, you will find that the only place you can get a job is through a shape-up which goes on every morning in Stockton's skid row between 3:00 and 5:30 a.m.

(2) The families which still depend on farm work for survival are, by and large, unable to survive on the earnings of the breadwinner. It is the rule for women and children to work in such families. How is a union going to organize the little children who pick berries, prunes, snap beans, etc., in the State of California?

(3) Rotten wages and working conditions have built irresponsibility -- or what appears to be irresponsibility -- into the farm labor market. A worker who is being paid only 85¢ an hour will quite understandably quit his job to move to another where he believes he will earn 95¢ an hour. Rumor tends to

be king within the harvest labor market. As I said in reply to question #1, workers may stay within a given crop-area throughout the season. But in the course of the season, they may work for many different growers, looking for the one which exploits them the least. This perpetual "shopping around" makes organization efforts difficult. It also makes an orderly harvest difficult, which is just one more reason why we feel rational growers are bound, sooner or later, to recognize that organization will benefit employer as well as employee.

4. "What is the feasibility and desirability of a "hiring hall" setup in agriculture such as the setups in the garment and construction industries?"

Surprising as it would no doubt be to many persons, agriculture already operates under the equivalent of a hiring hall, if a hiring hall be understood as an arrangement whereby groups ~~among~~ of men and groups of jobs are brought together. I have already referred to the system which operates on Stockton's skid row. There are similar arrangements in Sacramento, Fresno, and many other California cities. Labor contractors looking for workers, and workers looking for jobs meet in these labor markets, and there is a crude sort of matching of the two. The 57 bracero-users' associations in the State of California also operate what resembles, in some respects, a hiring hall. A grower-member telephones the association, says, "I want 100 Nationals next Monday," and, presto, the Nationals are delivered on schedule.

There is no question, then, as to the feasibility of a hiring hall system in agriculture. Let us consider briefly the question of desirability. The present arrangements, conducted by labor contractors and bracero-users' associations, are not, of course, genuine hiring halls. There are at least two essential distinctions which must be drawn. In the first place, the existing arrangements do not deliver workers so much as they deliver bodies. No real effort is made by contractors or associations to place men in positions for which they are suited by training and desire. One of the most basic absurdities of the present farm labor market is that it assumes farm workers are interchangeable units. The truth is that agricultural tasks are more highly specialized than tasks in construction, longshoring and warehousing, and other industries which use hiring halls. The skills entailed in ladder work are altogether different from the skills entailed in row crop work, for example. And within broad categories such as these, further refinements are necessary. Thinning sugar beets is not the same operation as thinning cotton; picking olives is as different from picking apricots as night from day. In view of the necessity to provide highly skilled and specialized workers for the performance of highly seasonal tasks, I do not hesitate to say that a hiring hall is even more desirable and essential in agriculture than in construction or longshoring. Present arrangements are not fulfilling the elemental requirements of efficiency or productivity.

The second basic difference between existing arrangements and the system we envisage is that all existing arrangements are operated solely for the pleasure of one party to the arrangement: the employer. We submit that this is unjust and inequitable, and for this reason if for no other must be replaced by a system in which the employee has a voice. But we submit, also, that a union-operated hiring hall will have the effect of raising worker morale incalculably. It will produce workers who are men rather than commodities, and we believe that a casual examination of history will show that a free labor force -- a force which labors in self-respect and dignity -- is not only an aid to the conscience of a society, but to its economy as well.

Enclosed are some of our research papers, which you may find useful. Please send us a copy of your research document upon its completion. And call on us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Henry P. Anderson, Research Director